



## Ethno-Religious and Regional Rivalry in Nigeria: An Old and Creeping Trend

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**Abstract:** One of the major characters of the Nigeria is the prominence of ethnicity, regionalism and religion in her formation from 1914, and the succeeding trends, particularly in her public affairs. These (ethnicity, regionalism and religion) have therefore, greatly been influencing her unity, cohesion, development and sustainability. Not only have these manifested and determined Nigerian state make up, structure and affairs, but also resulted in conflicts, threats to national cohesion, controversies, and unhealthy rivalry among the heterogeneous ethno-religious and regional groups in the country. This article explores ethno-religious and regional rivalry among Nigeria's prominent religions, major, small and minority ethnic groups. It also examined the factors responsible for, the effects of rivalry on Nigerian state and the policy measures put in place by various regimes to contain the rivalry. It is very clear from the study that the basic reasons for the rivalry are economic, political, power and fear of domination and supremacy by the others. The article also argues that although ethno-religious, regional rivalry has been a potent threat to Nigeria's unity and social bond, accommodation, stability and prosperity, it is also positively awakening individuals, religions, groups and regions to civic duties and political participation, stand for their rights, responsibilities, etc. The nature and extent to which the rivalry is pursued (either positive or negative) determines the consciousness and stimulation of drives by the groups to rise up to impending socio-economic and political development, which in turn speeds up the progress and development of the state, or further threaten national unity, social bond, and stability of Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Ethnicity, Federalism, Nigeria, Regions, Religion, Rivalry,

### Introduction

The evolution, growth, stability, development and sustenance of heterogeneous states and societies as Nigeria, is both complex and delicate. For several ethno-religious groups, socio-cultural, political and economic interests, and geo-regional factors (which may sometimes be conflicting) make up such states and societies, and each direct its demands and expectations to the state, which is saddled with the responsibility of harmonising, satisfying and regulating the rights, demands, interests and expectations of the citizens. The former colonies of both homogeneous and heterogeneous states and

societies (Nigeria inclusive) were involuntarily merged, while others were separated through colonial, artificial creation and or re-drawing of borders to suit colonial interests. Through this, many societies were forced to live with others, while some others were forcefully separated from their former brothers, kins and kith men (Berghahn, 2017; Al Quntar, 2017). Fortunately or unfortunately, many of these states and societies became heterogeneous in terms of new, artificial drawing and re-drawing of geo-ethnic, religious and political compositions – ethnic groups, religious beliefs, geo-regional history, environment, settlement and relations. As a result of those trends, many of these states and societies had to devise new means of not only accepting, but accommodating some others with whom they earlier shared little or nothing in common. These brought many of such states to the search for and practice a system with intention to accommodate the various diversities and preserve overall unity of state, survival, prosperity and sustainability. In line with that, one significant, strategic and viable, but not perfect option is adoption of a federal system of government.

States like Nigeria, Republic of South Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia, India, Russia, etc. adopt this system in order to keep the people united despite their diversities, and allow them to relative autonomy, but under a united umbrella of federal system (see also Kernell, Jacobson & Kousser, 2012; Abbink, 2011). But for all these and many other heterogeneous states, it has not been easy to keep the state, societies and their relative interest together because ethnic, religious and regional differences, which keep threatening the unity, harmony and sustenance of such states and societies (Ojie & Ewhrudjakpo, 2009).

Nigeria is the most heterogeneous and most populous state in Africa, and also the most populous wholly black nation in the world. It is the most diverse and complex African state comprising of hundreds of ethno-religious groups and languages, in addition to the clear geo-regional divide among its component units - North and



South, or East, North and West (Adetiba & Rahim, 2012), as well as pressure on the state system and federal arrangement for the diverse groups, regions and interest. Although there are other nations and states such as India, which are also as diverse as Nigeria, each heterogeneous state, whether former colony or developed, has its own peculiarities and circumstances, which determine and shape its process of evolution, growth, development and sustenance of the state-societal system (Gorenburg, 2003). One major area of concern to all the heterogeneous states and societies has to do with minority groups and their interests amidst majority set up (Tillin, 2007). Nigeria, composed of such complex and delicate heterogeneities and hundreds of minority groups, has to in addition cope up with peculiar ethno-religious rivalry among the various and heterogeneous ethno-religious, regional groups and societies' amidst the majority-minority and heterogeneity dilemma. The rivalry, although not new in her history of the journey to nationhood, is creeping into almost all sectors and taking numerous dimensions (Ojukwu & Oluwole, 2016).

### Statement of the Problem

Nigeria as a federal state has for long been bedevilled by the problems of ethno-religious and regional rivalry, which has been creeping in among its component units, citizens, and sectors (public and private). Despite the fact that Nigeria has been operating federal system with constitutional division of powers among the component units since pre independence era (October, 1954), there has up to this moment not been a conducive atmosphere for the federal set up to effectively function as institutionally intended (Ojukwu & Oluwole, 2016). The various ethno-religious and regional groups see themselves more as rivals and engaged in unhealthy competition or rivalry, rather than as brothers or partners in the federation, progress and development within diversity. It has actually been most difficult and often characterised by suspicion, political battle and sometimes bloodshed, controversy and mis-interpretation in most aspects of Nigeria's drive towards unity, development and sustainability (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Unhealthy rivalry has dominated the thoughts and actions of the various ethno-religious groups and regions, such that most policy actions, reactions in the state, groups, regions and or religions are conceived, interpreted, approached or reacted to with the primordial sentiment of rivalry and ultimate objective of dominating or outsmarting the other groups, regions and religions. Rivalry has thus permeated beyond politics and regionalism to almost all public and private sectors of Nigerians endeavours - access to and benefit from state

resources, recruitment, appointments and promotions in public service, states and local governments creations, winning new converts to religions (Islam and Christianity), etc. Alimba (2014) has thus decried the proliferation of ethnic militia and religious groups in all the regions of Nigeria, which is not only intensifying rivalry among Nigerians in the name of seeking justice to their respective groups, but end up terrorising, killing and maiming innocent citizens, in addition to threatening the national bonds of unity, cohesion, stability and sustenance. Similarly, Kitause & Achinuke (2013) have decried that religiosity has assumed an upsetting level with sharp competence and rivalry over dominance and supremacy among the religions in Nigeria.

The conglomeration of these problems pulls back and down Nigeria's drive to achieve unity, cohesion, stability and sustainable development within a diverse nation (Ojie & Ewurdjakpor, 2009), in relation to resistance to domination, subordination to and rising up against others. These are also tied to political, ethnic and religious entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs on the other hand, who use these as divide and rule tactics to enable them have further access to power and state resources. Ethnic rivalry is further creeping and is pitching even remote rural ethnic communities against one another in order to, among others attain supremacy over others, have access to, control and benefit from resources (Ojie & Ewurdjakpo (2009).

### Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this article are to explore the tendencies of ethno-religious and regional rivalry in the Nigerian federalism; explore the various factors responsible for the rivalry; and examine the extent to which this rivalry affects the unity, cohesion, development and sustainability of the Nigerian state and societies; and assess the extent to which Nigeria's federal/state system has been able to contain the rivalry among the various component units and ethno-religious groups.

### Background to Nigeria, Ethnicity, Regionalism, Religion and Rivalry

Nigeria, as a nation/state is a conglomeration of several ethnic and religious groups which resulted from the British colonial conquest from the year 1861, and finally yielded to one entity - Nigeria on January 1, 1914. Those geo-ethnic and religious groups were prior to 1914 having less things in common in relation to history, geography, peoples, religion, and culture, state, society and economy. Similarly, many the ethnic, religious and regional groups were not only their respective, but also unique socio-political and ethno-religious patterns



of life (Yahaya, 2016). The 1914 amalgamation and subsequent colonial policies, however, restructured most of the prior settings, and a new one by which the numerous and heterogeneous groups were merged to live together was entrenched. But right from the amalgamation of the areas and formation of one entity, Nigeria became practically influenced by factors of ethno-regional and tripod character and identity dominated by the ethnic and religious groups, prominent of which are the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba; Islam, Christianity and customary or traditional religious beliefs (Elaigwu & Garba in Chakravati & Srivastava, 2014).

From there on, ethnic, religious and regional tendencies have been shaping and influencing the affairs of the Nigerian state. Other factors such as early contact with the colonial masters, Western education, and religion have also greatly determined the flow of events in the subsequent Nigerian set up. Earlier contacts with the colonial masters and Western education have, in particular, placed the Southern Region of Nigeria at a greater advantage than the North. Because of Western education and exposure to the Western life, values and civilisation, the South was more able to forge ahead further in that context than the Northern region, which came at a bit later stage. This however did not mean that the North was not developed in its own economic and socio-political instances, for it had prior to the colonial domination and rule, composed of both religious and traditionally advanced states with forms of political and economic governance with agriculture as the basis of the economy. As a result of these, the prominent ethnic groups of the Igbo and Yoruba of the South East and West were ahead of the Northerners in terms of Western education, pattern of life, exposure to and experience of colonialism. Thus the Southerners were more to some extent, at the centre stage of the struggle against colonialism, self rule and independence.

With the struggle for self rule and independence becoming increasingly manifest, especially in the 1950's, the Northern region began to foresee the of future of Nigerianisation, self government and an independent Nigeria in which the vast majority, most populous, geographically larger and resource rich North was eventually not going to end up in the hands of its local and indigenous people, but others (Southerners), who were far ahead and had already substantially dominated the Federal Public Service, trade, professional and skilled jobs, as well as business and investment during the late pre-independence era. By then, there was already a creeping and threatening controversy over population figures, especially between the Igbo Eastern region and the North, which later ended

with political feud, a court case and to some extent led to the first military and bloody coup in Nigeria (see Kurfi, 2004; Clark, 1991; Shagari, 2001; Ademoyega, 1981).

On the other hand, other controversial events, which included the self-government motion of Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Northern Regional Government's Northernisation Policy, the December, 1959 federal elections and coalition, the 1964/65 election and NPC/NNA Alliance, the January and July, 1966 coups, and the Nigerian Civil War had also influenced ethno-religious and regional tendencies. These also have an overall effect on ethno-religious and regional conflicts and rivalry, especially among the majority (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) groups, who are prominent and dominant over other smaller and minority ethnic groups. It then became clear and obvious that while the majority ethnic groups were struggling against one another on ethno-regional primacy, relevance and hegemony, the minority groups were also trying to remove their shackles of domination by the majority ethnic groups on the other hand.

It is worth noting that despite the availability of the enormous literature on ethnicity, regions and religions in Nigeria, there are no generally accepted statistical figures on the exact number of ethnic groups, and members of each ethnic or religious group (see Chinazo Lady Franca, 2017; Nolte, Jones, Taiyari & Occhiali, 2016; Cline, 2011). In fact the issue of how many are there in each of the majority/minority ethnic groups and religions is part of the politics and rivalry. Ethnic, regional and religious rivalry in Nigeria also traces its roots to the fear of future domination of both public and private spheres of Nigerians, especially by the Igbos during the late colonial era. The other two major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba) had at a point come to realise the prominence and dominance of the Igbo Eastern regional ethnic group in both public and private spheres of life, and especially in the Northern Region, where the largest percentage of technical, professional and skilled works, in addition to the public service were in the hands of the Igbo/Eastern regional ethnic group. The then Northern Regional Government had officially realised the impending problem of possible lost of both regional public service and economic activities, technical and skilled jobs to the Igbo Easterners. This prompted the official commencement of the 'Northernisation Policy' by the then Northern Regional Government in order to ensure that the Northerners were prepared to take over their affairs and avoid the dominance of people from other regions (particularly the Igbo Easterners) from dominating both public, private



and commercial activities in the North (Clark, 1991; Paden, 1986).

Likewise in the Western Region, with the political and approach differences between Chief Awolowo and Premier Akintola, the Western Regional Government under Akintola (after succeeding Awolowo from 1959) realised among others, the possible domination of the in the Federal Public Service by the Igbos, as the Igbos had more technical and administrative personnel than the North and unless the Yoruba fully participated in the federal coalition government/alliance (which was only possible with cooperation and working with the North, but against Chief Awolowo's understanding and principle), their fair and gained positions in the federal public and private services (business and investments, public educational sector, public corporations, institutions, etc.) would be taken by the Igbo Easterners, who were already monopolising such, while the also majority Yoruba would be relegated to the background and dominated in the Nigerian affairs (see also Ojo, 2016). The desire to ensure full involvement of the Yoruba ethnic group/Western region and fear of possible exclusion and domination was what motivated Chief Akintola to have allied with the North and the Northern dominant political party (NPC), and form an alliance of national government in the federal 1964 elections, against the wish of Chief Awolowo.

At some certain levels, the majority ethnic groups and regions of Nigeria regard and treat one another with suspicion, resentment and despise, which are sometimes openly manifests in leaders' statements and or action on one hand over for example, the level of educational and economic development, perceived religious conservatism, resource control and allocation parasitism, etc. (see de Montclos, 2014; Onuoha and Nwanegbo, 2007:140). For example, the Igbos are commonly seen and regarded by other Nigerians as highly ambitious, dominant, and with high determination to achieve social and material prosperity; The Hausa/Fulani – religiously conservative with passion political power; and the Yoruba highly traditional and tribalistic, etc. (see Chinazo Lady Franca, 2017). Achebe (2012), in trying to portray the Igbo has posited that the Hausa/Fulani are bedevilled by the conservatism and dogma of religion, the Yoruba by traditional hierarchies, and the Igbos are the liberalised. These are sometimes imbibed from actions of past leaders, for example, Awolowo's refusal to form a coalition government with the NPC conservative and Muslim dominant North, the government of Sir Tafawa Balewa in 1959 and his tensed relation with Akintola in the 1962, 1963 Western regional crisis 1964 elections and Alliance as stated by Ojo (2016) and the Paden's (1986)

assertion on Premier Ahmadu Bello's open policy of Northernisation policy which categorically targeted the Igbos (see also Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012). On the other, the minority ethnic groups are and also regard themselves as despised, resented and inferiors by and before the majority ethnic groups.

The minority ethnic groups are also not only engaged in a struggle to liberate themselves of the majority domination, but also (at a lower level) the creeping rivalry with the majority groups in order to have relevance, access to and benefit from state resources and other socio-societal values. These are tied to hosts of perceived ethnic and historical domination and struggles for the liberation among, for example, the Sayawa/Zar, Katafawa/Atakar, Birom, etc. of the Northern Nigeria from the Hausa/Fulani (see also Yahaya, 2016). Such struggles had not only been long in history, but took many dimensions, including violent conflicts, the formation of or belonging to opposition political parties, e.g. the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in the Middle Belt, the Nigeria Peoples' Party (NPP), agitation for separate chiefdoms, districts and separate identities (see Alubo, 2006; Turaki, 1993; Paden, 1986). Thus the minorities keep agitating for the separate identities, states, local governments, etc. and whenever such creations are made, these minorities celebrate their liberation from the hegemony of the majority groups as witnessed during the various states and local governments' creations.

### Conceptualisation and Review of Literature

The concepts of ethnicity, ethnic groups and religion are controversial and have defied any singly accepted meaning or explanation among social scientists and scholars as noted by (Brown & Langer, 2010; Mustapha, 2016). In the same vein, Kitause & Achinuke (2013) have maintained that there are both complexity and delicacy in both scholarly and practical issues related to religion, which range from contextual and actual definition, patterns of belief, relative conception and practice, as well as levels of conviction and devotion. Chandra & Wilkinson (2008) and Adetiba & Rahim (2012) have concurred that ethnicity and related identity have to do with religion and sect, language and dialect, tribe and clan, race and caste, as well as national, regional or body composition, and also added that scholars diverge on why identities are termed ethnic. Ukiwo (2005) added that while it is commonly agreed that there are general constituents of ethnicity in individuals and groups, the social, moral and material basis and of end products, as well as the motives behind ethnicity remains controversial.

Osaghae & Suberu (2005) see ethnicity as the use or deployment of ethnic character or identity





distinctions to secure benefits under circumstances of rivalry, groups' effort making and pursuit, heterogeneities, etc. Ethnicity is, therefore, a deliberate and calculated means, tendency or move to gain certain benefits (material, moral or social). Horowitz (2014) has identified three problems inherent in multi ethnic and religious societies as: entrenching a policy to accommodate institutions; centripetal democratic and electoral institutions to the satisfaction of both the majority and the minority groups; and the prospects of achieving unity and cohesion amidst heterogeneities. He also characterised ethno-religious inclined states and societies as those with inter-ethnic hostility, and having ascriptive cleavages in politics with groups contending for state's central powers. Chandra & Wilkinson (2008) established two identities as: that which is formal and institutionalised identity involved in state politics and affairs (party politics, constitution and legal system, etc.) and informal/non-institutionalised identity, i.e. identity in social activities, organisations and actions. However, Adetiba & Rahim (2012) have affirmed that there is nothing bad or threatening with ethnicity, but the way and manner it is being depressingly used and portrayed by individuals against others, groups and society that havocs the socio-political, economic and cohesive nature and character of states and societies.

Langer (2010) and Brown & Langer (2010) have maintained that despite the fact that importance is placed on ethnicity, people have and maintain different identities (ethnic, religious, regional, cultural, historical, etc.), and relative to different events and circumstances, these identities sometimes intermix and overlap. This, therefore, means depending on socio-societal and circumstantial contexts, ethnicity, religion or other identities may hold over others in affairs. Meagher (2009) linked the ethno-religious tendencies in African states to the economic dimensions with increased hardship, which he lamented is often neglected, but having important role and consequences on state and societies. These ethnic and religious groups seek more relevance and access to benefit from the resources, whether state or donation from international donor organisations. This, he added, has been responsible for the increased tendency and proliferation of ethno-religious groups.

Kitaase & Achinuke (2013) and Mustapha (2016) have also observed the significance and dominance of religion in the minds and activities of Nigerians, and their ever increasing attachment to it because of the tremendous socio-psychological and spiritual gains that are derived from the religions. They added that religiosity is a source of both joy and concern to Nigerian state and societies for its

significant roles in establishing social and spiritual bonds, restrictions and regulations of individuals and groups' conducts on one hand, and also as a readily available tool for mischief, instability and manipulation. In Nigeria, several factors such as pattern of communal, political, residential settlements, geo-physical setting, sex, and age are determinant and influential in individuals, marriages and groups' classification of religion (Nolte, et al., 2016).

### **Manifestation and Dimensions of Ethno-Religious Rivalry in Nigeria**

The root of ethno-religious not only conflicts, but also the rivalry in Nigeria are traced to colonial amalgamation of 1914 (from where the ethnic, religious groups and regions began to see one another as rivals) on one hand, and then embarked on struggles over power, prestige and state resources on the other (Jacob, 2012). It is, therefore, no news that there have been existing old, but cold war and ethnic rivalry among the major Nigerian ethnic groups, particularly between the Igbo of the Eastern and Yoruba of Western Nigeria, and also the majority-minority groups as maintained by Ojukwu & Oluwole, (2016). Omaka (2017) has also put the blame of rivalry among the heterogeneous groups in Nigeria between among the majority and minority groups to colonialism which chunked the various small and minority ethnic groups into the majority groups (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba groups) into a federation with the minorities unable to play any significant national leadership or political roles. Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) noted Nigeria as a typical manifestation of tripod ethno-regional structure that is both complex and delicate to handle. They further identified the dynamics of ethno-regional and religious rivalry in the Nigerian federation as: the majority (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) on one hand, and other minority groups on the other; the north-South Islam Christianity religious cut; North-South divide and dichotomy; prolonged census controversies between north and south; the federal-states structure (19 for the North and 17 states for the South, and 3 equal geo-political zones, but proportionally different in size and population).

Religion is manifest and expressed in both public and private quantum of Nigerians, it is as well preached, practiced and out of its fraction and contexts, with open and public display, which also resulted in the various conflicts, intra and inter rivalry (Gaiya, 2016:49). Similarly, the extent to which hegemony and rivalry is sought and carried out by religious groups and denominations is also manifest in the increased patronage to media with advertisements on worship centres, with the intention of gaining more popularity and drawing



more members and patronage, material gains, etc., as well as proliferation of religious groups and centres all over Nigeria, particularly Islam and Christianity (Gaiya, 2016:47; Mustapha, 2016).

There are numerous dimensions of ethno-religious rivalry in the Nigerian context and on each base, the various groups are primarily interested in hegemony and dominance over other groups, material motives, access to and maximum benefit from the resources. The various groups and regions engage in the rivalry on several dynamics as: internally within the religions of Islam and Christianity with proliferation of worship centers, denominations, etc., in order to have and command large followership, access both state and private individuals, religious foundations and donors, etc., whether local or international (Ukah, (2016).

There is also the inter-religious rivalry among the prominent religions of Islam and Christianity, which also involves not only the above material and hegemonic motives, but also seeking more relevance and popularity within both public and private realms. The Prominent religions at each level seek connections with national, states or local public leadership in order for them to be able to influence public policy making, assert power and dominance over the other religion and access resource with ease. These have been obviously seen by Nigerians through association with leaders, organisation and conduct of special prayer sessions for a leader, politician or government official, using public resources. While the leaders/state officials' reward back with hefty donations to the religions, gaining official recognition and influence over public issues such as appointments, policy making, etc. All these are despite the clear constitutional provision that Nigeria shall be a secular state (Section 10 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999)

Ukiwo (2007) observed the educational perspective of ethno-regional rivalry in Nigeria maintained that through numerous and varied educational policies, the extent of rivalry among the ethno-regional groups have been checked and issues of domination in the federal public service and others were contained and or avoided. This was because the regions pursued educational programmes and policies that not only accelerated, but also smoothened the rivalry and drew a relative balance, especially in the federal public service as represented by the regions (see also Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012). The rivalry also manifests between majority and minority groups across all the regions of Nigeria, as the colonial masters in their bid to merge the peoples for their interests concocted a federation in which hundreds of small and minority groups could neither play any significant national leadership or political roles, nor greatly influence

the pattern of events as the prominent and the majority ethnic have made a tripod of geo-political and national leadership (Omaka, 2017).

### **Factors influencing Ethno-Religious Rivalry**

Life is generally characterised by competing in several contexts and spheres, as such people use ethnic, religious or other tendencies to achieve their targets over power, resources and other values of life in such competitions (Eifert, Miguel & Posner, 2010). But on a specific note, Jafari, Dedeoğlu, Regany, Üstündağlı & Batat (2014), Gaiya (2016:47) and Adetiba & Rahim (2012) have all maintained that the ethno-religious ill feeling and competition are originally not part of ethno-religious roots, but rather the differences stimulated by socio-political, economic, ideological and other intentions, and through which groups also seek political ascendancy over the others. While identifying the factors responsible for and influencing ethno-religious rivalry and conflicts in Nigeria, Jacob (2012) blamed the colonial masters for among others separate settlement for the non-indigenes (Southerners) who were during the colonial days living in the Northern region, unequal and differential treatment to the ethnic groups, separate educational policies, separate administrations of the North and Southern regions, limited power to purchase land in other regions, and conferring much power to traditional rulers.

Similarly, Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) and Brown & Langer (2010) have asserted that ethnic rivalry and related tendencies are made significant in the states, especially Africa by factors as of: politics and elections (as manipulated by elites), relocating hostilities of power and inequity to other places, gain access to and benefit from state resources, and desire to control and maintain power. They further established that there is linkage between ethnic identification and electoral activities, which both undermine cohesion of a state. Adetiba & Rahim (2012) have similarly observed the inability to have access to and equitably benefit from state resources as a major drive to ethnic tendencies and a potent threat to sense of belonging, national unity and cohesion of a state. For Attah (2013) and Eifert, et al. (2010), ethno-religious tendencies have been largely intensified by both political and economic segregations, which fuelled ethno-religious and regional interest over the national objectives and interest among Nigerians, and that there is a significant relationship between political competition and ethnic identification, especially in heterogeneous states. This therefore, vividly indicates that ethno-regional tendencies, have to a large extent, become a means of seeking the fair share of national resources, positions, but which end up emasculating the social bond, progress and



development of the Nigerian state (Birbir, et al., 2015; Suberu, 2010).

One major factor responsible for the increased ethno-religious tendencies is the increased use and manipulation of same by the elites to achieve their personal interests - power acquisition and consolidation, and further access to state resources (Adetiba & Rahim, 2012). Sometimes, the rivalry is also fuelled the statements, actions and reactions of elites and the so called ethno-religious and regional leaders who sometimes engage in remarks portraying superiority/inferiority of one ethnic or religious group, and actions or reactions that incite or provoke other rival groups to swing into action or reaction to a certain move (Ojo, 2016; Achebe, 2012; Ojie & Ewurdjakpo, 2009). On the other hand, many ethnic and religious groups have the phobia of losing cultural values and integrity among the others, which also fuels the rivalry and or conflicts.

### **Effects of Ethno-religious tendencies and Rivalry on Nigerian State, Societies and Regions**

Ethno-religious rivalry has mixed effects (both positive and negative) on Nigerian state and societies for it cannot be discerned that it is an all negative trend. Cline (2011) has observed that ethnic and religious tendencies are used by Nigerians for both protection as well as promotion of ideological and practical objectives in Nigeria, but resulting in violence, which also feeds on itself. Politicians, ethno-religious entrepreneurs find it easier and more convenient to use and manipulate religion, ethnic or communal basis in order secure votes and political offices (Bogaards, Basedau & Hartmann, 2010). For that, Jafari et al. (2014) have posited that instrumentalised religiosity leads to ethnocentric tendencies as well as identity myopia, which also result in further socio-societal susceptibilities. Similarly, ethnicity and religiosity play a key role in the struggle for power and particularly, in times of elections, while politicians take the advantage of ethno-religious and other tendencies to achieve their political schemes (Eifert, et al., 2010). Mainly, the end results are continuous mutual suspicion, unhealthy struggle and disunity, as well as further threats to national unity, peace, prosperity and sustainability. It has resulted to further distance of social bonds and unity between among both the majority groups on one hand, and the majority-minority on the other. It has also resulted in proliferation of ethnic, regional, intra and inter-religious groups, which are more divisive in tendencies, rather than uniting or consolidating bonds among Nigerians. There are today, numerous unregistered, potentially security threatening ethnic and religious groups across the federation of Nigeria operating under various platforms. These altogether affect all spheres of

Nigeria's process of continuous evolution, and bond across ethno-regional and religious lines, stability, and development. Thus the first century of Nigeria's makeup has not achieved the primary basis of national unity and bond across ethno-religious and regional lines.

### **Positive Aspects of Ethno-Religious Rivalry in Nigeria**

Although ethno-religious rivalry is a major threat to Nigeria's unity, cohesion and sustainability, it is evidently clear that ethno-religious rivalry, particularly in Nigeria is not absolutely negative or that it does not offer any good to the Nigerian state and societies. Indeed and positively, the ethnic and religious groups are increasingly becoming aware and more conscious of their rights, privileges and to some extent duties, to which they also stand up, seek and protect through legal, influential and persuasive means. From the formal federal, regional and states, local, legal and political provisions, policies and programmes, which mostly emphasise social justice, equitable sharing of national, states and regional values, Nigerians have become awakened and stood to seek and defend their fair share, although such depend on the circumstances and personalities involved (see also Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 [Sections 33-43; 14]).

Those policies and awakened consciousness are actually averting what could have probably lead to more negative ethno-religious tendencies in view of the desperation of some of the ethno-religious groups to access resources or penetrate into the state machinery for their group's gains, achieve hegemony over others, and secure more members. It is also clear from experience that that both the rivalry and the Nigerian Civil War have largely influenced the extent to which the Igbo ethnic group of Eastern region have gone ahead of every other Nigerian group in trades, skilled jobs, commercial and productive investment, which has greatly helped in resettling them and subsequent prosperity in the post-Civil-War Nigeria (Chinazo Lady Franca, 2017).

Furthermore, the extent to which policies such as those 'Northernisation' and Akintola's strive to ensure that the Northern and Western Regions were respectively not left behind in the then federal/central government, national politics and local control of regions had greatly saved the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba from the dominance of the Igbo ethnic group in all affairs, especially the public service and business sector, as well as professional, skilled and technical jobs all over Nigeria during the first republic and beyond (See Ojo, 2016; Tugbiyele, 2005; Paden, 1986; Richard, 1986; Osaghae, 1988). These have partly averted



what could possibly have been another tragedy apart from the Civil-War fought between July, 1967 and January, 1970. The rivalry among both majority and minority groups has also become an assuaging factor to the constant ethno-religious conflicts, as rival groups are gradually resorting to non-violent rivalry, rather than violent conflicts to express their dissatisfaction and grievances over issues, or seek and pursue their interests. Similarly, with a healthy and positive rivalry pursued, the tendency for civic, political participation and making positive impacts in national affairs are increased, as Nigerians are through rivalry made to consciously or otherwise perform their civic duties in the process of trying to access benefits, which also indirectly opens up affairs, especially public for accountability, responsibility and transparency since rival groups are on the watch for wrong doings, injustices, etc.

### **State Policies to Contain Ethno-Religious Tendencies**

Public policies are made in several ways in order to institutionalise, contain, legitimise and regulate the actions and reactions of the various groups and individuals within the diverse Nigerian state for peace, order, stability and sustainability (Ojie & Ewruhjakpo, 2009). But Bogaards et al. (2010) have raised the fundamental question of whether constitutional provisions in heterogeneous states can bring about accommodation, unity and harmony in order to strengthen popular rule and stability since most of the state dynamics are shaped and greatly influenced by the informal, rather than the formal state established institutions. The fact Nigeria was originally a conglomeration of heterogeneous geo-ethnic, religious and socio-culturally distinct groups, partly necessitated the adoption of federal system even before independence. That was basically in recognition of the differences with the objectives of living together in unity, harmony, prosperity and sustainability, but with the preservation of the local differences. Towards further consolidation of these objectives, various Nigerian governments have come up with several and dynamic policies and programmes, dependent on emerging circumstances and contexts.

Ojie & Ewruhjakpo (2009) have outlined several policies and constitutional provisions such as the Sabon Gari, Native Authority (NA) in Northern Nigeria, adoption of federalism, the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (NYSC); establishment of federal and states' unity schools; enactment of Federal Character Principle in the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and an attempt to include and enact rotational presidency in the 1995 Draft Constitution. Nigerians at informal levels have also

devised and deployed other political and tension managing strategies such as the various gentlemen, amicable agreements among political parties; ceding national political offices among them, especially the presidency - to the South in 1999, North in 2007, etc. (see also Nwozor, 2014).

Specifically, Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) have noted that federal character has been a very strategic and formal policy meant to accommodate and unite heterogeneous society groups in Nigerian state, and so was meant to institutionalise and achieve integration and justice to all, especially the minorities. As a result of competition among elites and groups in the Nigerian federation, power sharing has become a popular means of managing ethno-religious tendencies especially in relation to state powers (Mustapha, 2009). In terms observing unity and accommodation in politics and elections at both federal and states levels, Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) applauded the significances of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of  $\frac{2}{3}$  electoral requirement for winning presidential and states governorship elections, quota system in federal educational institutions and public service, formation of political parties across Nigeria's ethno-regional and religious divide, Federal Character principle, representation of each state and local government in the federal and states' cabinets, in addition to the constitutional provision of equality and social justice among Nigerians (see also Sections 132-137 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, the enactment of these respective policies and programmes, as well as the informal and political moves have in reality, not done as much as expected, to contain ethno-religious tendencies, and thus arousing more questions as to the efficacy of the policies and programmes (Osaghae, 2005). Part of the blame, however, lies on the state authorities charged with the enforcement and compliance with such provisions. Kendhammer (2014) has asserted that Nigeria's sticking to ethnic related tendencies has not yielded the much desired national unity and accommodation despite the constitutional power-sharing provision under the aegis of the Federal Character, which he also labelled as discriminatory policy that emphasises ethnicity over federal/national citizenship. In the same scenario, Gaiya (2016) has observed that achieving national unity, cohesion and integration have not been possible in Nigeria due to the fact that the forces of disintegration in Nigeria are still strong and significant in the minds, attitudes and actions of Nigerians. He further outlined the major disintegrating forces, which are directly related to ethno-religious tendencies as: resource control (specifically oil), Islamic Shariah controversy,





resurfacing of ethnic and militia groups, and indigene/settler contentions.

Ugoh and Ukpere (2012) have questioned the mode by which some regimes, authorities and or individuals interpret and implement the federal character principle of quota system in terms of appointments, which often shows tilt or skew to one region, religion or major tribe. All these are in spite of some previous regional (Northern and Western) policies and programmes for example, the 'Northernisation Policy' and Akintola's approach to national politics that the regions had their fair share of federal, regional posts and the subsequent constitutional, political provisions and policies, as well as the informal consensus and concessions among Nigerian politicians to achieve national unity, stability and sustainability. These made Haynes (2007) to proffer that ethno-religious tendencies can be contained with meaningful and expansive and inclusive democratisation, and improved economic being, as the rivalry and conflicts are mostly based on competition for resources, especially where there are elements of political instability coupled with the failure to provide equitable development.

### Conclusion

Identity and characters of ethnicity, region and religion are indispensable part of most heterogeneous and developing states and societies. While individuals, groups and societies in Nigeria

constitute such a heterogeneous state, these characters are in themselves good attributes, for they originally preach and teach tolerance, accommodation, unity, social bond and good neighbourhood, etc. However, the way and manner by which such characters have been managed have over time hindered the socio-economic, unity, stability and sustainability of the Nigerian state. Such management of the heterogeneities has also given rise to rivalry among the individuals and groups. However, ethno-religious and regional rivalry in Nigeria cannot be absolutely condemned, because apart from its negatively impacts, it has positively led to more productivity, civic and political participation, standing for and demand of rights and privileges among the various individuals and groups.

The various state policies and constitutional provisions of the respective regimes were meant to contain the negative aspects of ethno-religious and regional tendencies, but the negative actions and reactions of the heterogeneous groups in the search for power, access to resources and hegemony have over-powered the policies. This is partly due to the poor political will and commitment, enforcement and compliance with the policies and constitutional provisions by individuals, groups and authorities on one hand, and the excessive desire of the ethno-religious groups and regions to assert their interests over those of others and the Nigerian state.

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